

HDCC208E • Fall 2012

Seminar in Digital Cultures & Creativity: Digital Music and Sound

Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:45pm • 0135 Taliaferro (Women's Studies Multimedia Studio)

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Course Description

Digital music and sound is all around us. In this seminar, we will assess it as a historical and cultural phenomenon, learn to interpret some of its many meanings, and embrace it as a creative medium. The course will survey the history of digital audio and electronic musical genres alongside hands-on explorations of associated technologies. We will read about, listen to, and discuss creative work in DJing, hip hop, electronic and experimental music genres. We will engage debates around technological progress, authorship, ownership, and community formation which are integral to digital media and cultures. In both collaborative and individual projects, students will develop skills in digital music production using free or low-cost software such as the audio editor Audacity and sound apps for iPads. Upon completion of the course, students will be conversant in historical and cultural dimensions of digital music and sound, and able to complete creative projects using sound as a primary mode of expression.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will receive focused exposure to a special topic within the broad purview of digital cultures and creativity.
- They will explore the topic both critically or theoretically and in practical, hands-on ways using digital tools and technologies.
- Students will be able to discuss major issues and debates in the area of the seminar topic, and be conversant with important concepts and terms.
- Students will synthesize insights from one another as well as the instructor and their readings in order to produce a final project that displays real depth of creativity and insight.

Assignments

Participation (10%): Your regular attendance and active engagement is an integral part of your success in this course. I expect that you will attend every class and give your very best in class discussions and activities. Because students have different learning and communication styles, I will evaluate your participation on the quality and thoughtfulness of your engagement with course material rather than the quantity of it.

Quiz (5%): One in-class quiz on audio terms and concepts (Sept 13).

Reading Responses (15%): Four times during the semester (Thurs Sept 20, Tues Oct 9, Thurs Nov 1, Tues Nov 27), you will complete a short written response to the readings,

addressing prompts related to the readings, and/or supplementing those responses with web research or a creative exercise. I will drop the lowest grade of these responses (so 3 responses will be worth 5% of your course grade each).

Group Projects (20%): Early in the semester, I will form small collaborative groups of students (likely 6 groups of 4 students each) who will work together on 2 different projects, worth 10% of the course grade each: 1) creating a sample bank (due Tues Oct 2) and 2) creating a work of sound installation art (due Thurs Nov 15)

Midterm Project (15%): The midterm assignment (due Tues Oct 23), will be to create a 2-3 min. sound collage or mix in Audacity or Ableton Live using the Freesound.org sound libraries created by classmates and/or sounds of iPad instruments. Students will write a short statement to accompany the mix.

Final Project Proposal (5%): In advance of completing the final project, students will submit a written proposal for that project (due Fri Nov 16). Similar to a funding application, this paper will propose the project's conceptual foundation and technical scope, and relate its significance to course readings and themes.

Final Project (30%): Students will complete a final project consisting of a sound recording, installation or performance, or web-based audio piece, and accompanying written statement that elaborates on the piece's concept and cultural context. The final project may be a more ambitious elaboration of an assignment or in-class activity from earlier in the semester, or something new. Collaborations will be allowed and encouraged, although each student will have to complete their own written statement.

Semester Schedule and Course Readings

- This syllabus is subject to change as we move through the course; students will be notified in advance of any changes to readings, assignments, exams or grading.
- Assigned readings are to be done before the date under which they are listed.
- Please bring readings to class (hard copy or electronic format) so that you may reference them during discussion.

I. Introductions to Digital Music and Sound

Thurs Aug 30 - Greetings; Course Overview

Read and consider the "Read, Write, Cite" document on Blackboard.

Tues Sept 4 - Culture and Technology

Slack, Jennifer Daryl, and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture + Technology: A Primer*. "Section I: Culture and Technology: The Received View - Progress, Convenience, Determinism, Control" (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 9-64.

Thurs Sept 6 - Hearing and Listening

Oliveros, Pauline. "Preface," *Deep Listening: A Composer's Practice* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), xv-xix.

McCartney, Andra. "Soundscape Works, Listening, and the Touch of Sound," in *Aural Cultures*, edited by Jim Drobnick (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004), 179-85.

In class:

Watch excerpts of TEDTalk: "Evelyn Glennie Shows How to Listen":

http://www.ted.com/talks/evelyn_glennie_shows_how_to_listen.html

Oliveros, Pauline. "The Poetics of Environmental Sound" (1984) / Deep Listening exercise

Tues Sept 11 - Music and Sound in Context: Beeps, Sports, Campaigns

Heffernan, Virginia. "Beep!" *New York Times*, March 19, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/21/magazine/21FOB-medium-t.html> (Read and check out media examples)

Sullivan, Becky. "Making The Olympics Sound Right, From a 'Swoosh' to a 'Splash'," *All Things Considered*, NPR, July 28, 2012 (5 min. 54 sec). <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetorch/2012/07/28/157442046/making-the-olympics-sound-right-from-a-swoosh-to-a-splash> (Listen to the story, and/or read text with audio examples)

"Political Attack - Background Music for Negative Campaign Ad," *AudioSparx: The Music That Powers Hollywood*, 2012. http://www.audiosparx.com/sa/summary/soundpack.cfm/sound_iid.499914 (Read text and listen to audio examples)

Recommended:

Farinella, David John. "The Sounds of Summer," *Mix*, September 1, 2001. http://mixonline.com/mag/audio_sounds_summer/

Costa, Robert. "Songs for Campaign Seasons Past and Present," *Wall Street Journal*, October 2, 2008. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122290103509796055.html>

In class:

Descriptive writing exercise

Thurs Sept 13 - Sound and Digital Audio Basics

Huber, David Miles, and Robert E. Runstein. "Sound and Hearing," ch. 2 in *Modern Recording Techniques*, 5th ed. (Boston: Focal Press, 1997), 23-52.

Roads, Curtis. "Digital Audio Concepts," excerpts from ch. 1 in *The Computer Music Tutorial* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 7-31.

In class:

Quiz on Huber & Runstein and Roads (attendance required; no make-up given)

II. Digital Music Production

Tues Sept 18 - Microphone Techniques

Rodgers, Tara. Interview with Annea Lockwood, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 115-27.

Schroder, Carla. "Microphones," in *The Book of Audacity*, 40-44.

Recommended:

White, Paul. Excerpts from *Basic Microphones* (London, UK: Sanctuary Publishing, 1999), 13-43, 97-124.

In class:

Microphone demos; Tascam digital recorders

Thurs Sept 20 - Electronic Musical Instruments: Histories and Futures

Chadabe, Joel. "The Early Instruments," ch. 1 of *Electric Sound: The Past and Promise of Electronic Music* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 1-20.

Gitelman, Lisa, and Geoffrey B. Pingree. "Introduction: What's New About New Media?" *New Media, 1740-1915* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), xi-xxii.

Recommended:

Burton, Charlie. "How Bjork's 'Biophilia' album fuses music with iPad apps," *Wired UK*, July 26, 2011. <http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2011/08/features/music-nature-science?page=all>

** Reading Response #1 due **

In class:

Electronic music instrument history

Explore Björk's *Biophilia* - buy and install app before class; bring iPads to class and headphones if you have them

Tues Sept 25 - Introduction to Audacity; iPad apps; Work Session - MEET IN QAN 0113

Schroder, Carla. "Audacity from Start to Finish," ch. 1 in *The Book of Audacity* (San Francisco: No Starch Press, 2011), 1-30.

In class:

Audacity & iPad instrument demos

Discuss & begin Group Project #1 - Create a sample library ("pack") for Freesound.org

Assignment objectives: Critical listening; collaborative creativity; recording and exporting audio files at correct levels; making clean edits; using fades

Thurs Sept 27 - Group Project #1 - Work Session - MEET IN QAN 0113

Tues Oct 2 - Group Project Work Session

Thurs Oct 4 ** Group Project #1 due ** - Presentations and Discussion

Tues Oct 9 - NO CLASS - Prof. out of town - Sampling: History, Aesthetics, Politics -

Do readings, watch film, and complete response

McLeod, Kembew. "The Private Ownership of Culture," ch. 1 in *Owning Culture: Authorship, Ownership, and Intellectual Property Law* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 1-26.

Bartlett, Andrew. "Airshafts, Loudspeakers, and the Hip-Hop Sample," in *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., edited by Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2012), 565-78.

((over))

Watch:

Scratch hip hop documentary, approx. 90 min (accessible as streaming video on Blackboard through 10/15; DVD should also be available in Hornbake basement/Non-Print Media Services) -> You are encouraged to watch the movie with classmates, perhaps during our scheduled class time.

** Reading Response #2 due by 5PM **

Thurs Oct 11 - Sampling and Mash-ups (cont'd)

“The Recombinant DNA of the Mash-Up - Interactive Feature,” *New York Times*, January 6, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/01/09/magazine/mashup-timeline.html?ref=magazine>

Owen Chapman, “The Evolution of Mash-up Culture,” TEDxConcordia: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83lhAlmp5vY>

In class:

Sampling discussion, listening session

Tues Oct 16 - Mixing Techniques and Work Session

White, Paul. Excerpts from *Basic Mixing Techniques* (London, UK: Sanctuary Publishing, 2000), 31-60, 79-106.

Senior, Mike. “Mix Mistakes,” *Sound on Sound* (September 2011). <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/sep11/articles/mix-mistakes.htm?print=yes>

In class:

Mix assignment distributed

Assignment objectives: Multitrack editing and mixdown; effective use of panning and effects; careful crafting of a sonic or musical “narrative” over the designated length of time.

Mixing lecture; Introductions to Traktor and Ableton Live

Thurs Oct 18 - Mixing Work Session - MEET IN QAN 0113

Tues Oct 23 - Mix Presentations and Critique

**** Mix due in Dropbox folder by 1 pm ****

Thurs Oct 25 - Mix Presentations and Critique (cont'd)

III. Listening in a “Digital Age”

Tues Oct 30 - Digital Formats and Distribution

Sterne, Jonathan. “The MP3 as Cultural Artifact,” *New Media & Society* 8 (2006): 825-42.

White, Emily. “I Never Owned Any Music To Begin With,” *All Songs Considered: The Blog*, NPR, June 16, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/allsongs/2012/06/16/154863819/i-never-owned-any-music-to-begin-with>

Lowery, David. “Letter to Emily White at NPR All Songs Considered,” *The Trichordist: Artists For An Ethical Internet*, June 18, 2012. <http://thetrichordist.wordpress.com/2012/06/18/letter-to-emily-white-at-npr-all-songs-considered/>

Recommended:

Hilton, Robin. "A Perpetual Debate: Owning Music In The Digital Age," *All Songs Considered: The Blog*, NPR, June 19, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/allsongs/2012/06/19/155313212/a-perpetual-debate-owning-music-in-the-digital-age>

In class:

Digital music ownership debate

Discuss digital distribution formats: Soundcloud, Bandcamp, podcasts, more...

Thurs Nov 1 - Mobile Listening exercise

Bull, Michael. "No Dead Air! The iPod and the Culture of Mobile Listening," *Leisure Studies* 24, no. 4 (October 2005): 343-55.

** Reading Response #3 due **

IV. Sound, Space, and Experience

Tues Nov 6 - Sound and Space

Blessner, Barry, and Linda-Ruth Salter. "Auditory Spatial Awareness," ch. 2 in *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 11-66.

Recommended:

Than, Kher. "Ancient Maya Temples Were Giant Loudspeakers?" National Geographic, December 16, 2010. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/12/101216-maya-acoustics-speakers-audio-sound-archaeology-science/>

In class:

Review mobile listening assignment

Introduce multichannel sound installations and Group Project #2

Thurs Nov 8 - Introduction to Sound Art and Data Sonification

Licht, Alan. "Sound Art: Origins, Development and Ambiguities," *Organised Sound* 14, no. 1 (2009): 3-10.

In class:

History of sound art

Introduce Group Project #2

Tues Nov 13 - Group Project #2 - Work Session

Thurs Nov 15 - Group Project #2 ** Presentations due in class **

Fri Nov 16 - ** Final project proposal due via email by 5pm **

Tues Nov 20 - Individual meetings to discuss final project proposals

Thurs Nov 22 - NO CLASS - Thanksgiving holiday

Tues Nov 27 - Sound, Bodies, and Power

Henriques, Julian. "Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System," in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, edited by Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 451-80.

Cusick, Suzanne G. "'You are in a place that is out of the world...': Music in the Detention Camps of the 'Global War on Terror,'" *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2, no. 1 (Feb. 2008): 1-26.

**** Reading Response #4 due ****

Thurs Nov 29 - Final Project Individual Meetings / Work Session

Tues/Thurs Dec 4/6 - Presentations

Tues Dec 11 - LAST DAY OF CLASSES - Presentations

**** Final projects due by 9PM Tues Dec 11 ****